Introduction

It is a long-standing claim that society has become mediated. People today live in a world that more than before extends outside their immediate sphere of observation, and the media sphere thus becomes crucial for people to know even the most basic facts about their relevant surrounding. Societal involvement and the carrying out of basic functions increasingly requires people to also interact via media – from e-mail to more advanced social networks that guide everyday life. This development has been called mediation (Livingstone 2009).

Although the heightened attention towards media makes itself appear as a novel development, it goes without saying that the media’s role in society is not something new. Also, just as terrorism is not a new phenomenon (Chaliand and Blin 2007), there is nothing new in the connection between actions that have been labelled – or label themselves – acts of terrorism, and the representation of these actions in the media. In an obscure writing titled Advice for Terrorists, published in the journal Freiheit, September 13, 1884, the anarchist John Most wrote:

We have said a hundred times or more that when modern revolutionaries carry out action, what is important is not solely the actions themselves but also the propagandistic effect that they are able to achieve. Hence, we preach not only action in and of itself,
This approach evidently puts the expected representation of the action in the centre of the planning and of the action itself. In the words of John Most:

Since we believe that the propaganda of action is of use, we must be prepared to accept whatever attendant circumstances it involves. Everyone now knows, from experience, that the more highly placed the one shot or blown up, and the more perfectly executed the attempt, the greater the propagandistic effect. The basic preconditions of success are methodological preparation…(Most 1884, cited in Laqueur and Alexander 1978/1987, 100.)

In the light of the most salient act in this line, taken in recent years, some lines in E.B White’s legendary presentation of New York appear prophetic:

All dwellers in cities must live with the stubborn fact of annihilation; in New York the fact is somewhat more concentrated because of the concentration of the city itself, and because, of all targets, New York has a certain clear priority. In the mind of whatever perverted dreamer might loose the lightning, New York must hold a steady, irresistible charm. (White 1949/1999, 54.)

The importance of publicity is, however, not only understood among those who commit actions that in media are reported as terrorism. Also their counterparts, the military and police forces, understand the relevance of affecting the public mind. Thus, as research shows, major incidents have been followed by relevant improvements in the conditions for the official violence apparatus. Journalists are affected to be more patriotic (Barnett and Reynolds 2009; Nacos 2007); increases in the budget for anti-terror activities occur (Alexander 2006a; Parmentier 2006; Schneckener 2006). The media are considered to have an impact on how the conflict spiral is waged (Brown 2003, 49). As a result, a growth in support occurs; not only of political leaders in power (in the US, the Congress and the President), but also of the executive branches of authorities responsible for intelligence and military (Brewer, Aday and Gross 2003, 247). This would mark a shift from the symbolic patriotism that builds on a general affection that one feels for the nation’s way of life and values towards a blind patriotism, providing unconditional support for its institutions and policies (c.f., Parker 2010, 97).

With an increasingly mediated society, now boosted by the Internet, the expected dissemination through media of news on dramatic events is continually growing. With new techniques that have introduced real time television and prime time war (Denton Jr. 1993; Pritchard 2003; Watt 2003) the dissemination of news becomes more rapid than ever (Greenberg et al 2002). This development puts journalism and the conduct of media under severe strain in finding a balance in its reporting of events that by some are considered acts aiming at liberation and by others as acts
of terror. Ultimately, we may ask whether current reporting standards adequately fit the challenges that journalists are facing.

The Mediatization Dilemma

In current debate on how media interacts with society, one important aspect is how the autonomous professionalism developed by journalists interacts with the political system. This has been called mediatization of political communication, signifying that journalists take a professional role in regard to other institutions in society. Journalists act according to a media logic. This logic is based on professional standards established in education and workplace practice; growing out of an increasingly professionalized trade, and on legislation and ethical rules (see, e.g., EthicNet), standardized through international research and professional co-operation. All these contribute to a homogenization of the role perceptions of journalists worldwide. In order to affect how the public opinion is informed, other actors in societal life are then acting in anticipation of the outcome of the media coverage, guided by professionalized journalists. (Asp 1986; Asp and Esaiasson 1996; Strömbäck 2009).

From what has been argued above, it is more than apparent that all types of actors that involve themselves with actions of politically oriented violence are quite conscious of how media will reflect their actions; and apparently also in many cases motivated by this aspect in shaping their actions. The question of how journalists should act in relation to politically oriented violence has been raised by many.

Looking at the longue-durée of terrorism, Wieviorka (1988) has pointed to the different relationships that political movements with a violent agenda have with media, from indifference or even adversarial attitudes to active usage of the anticipated actions of media as part of their strategy. Wilkinson (1997, 62) has discussed political movement's use of violence as a method of hijacking the media, warning journalists of the consequences of real time television-type reporting and calling for self-restrictive behaviour by journalists. More recent analysts (e.g., Alves, 2007) have pointed to the entrance of the Internet as a part of publicity, pointing to the liberative potential in today’s media society that prevents oppressive governments from censoring information – which would include also information covering political violence.

The approaches cover broad ground and are clearly ideological in nature. Although several efforts to define terrorism have been made (c.f., Wilkinson 1997, 51; Alexander 2006a, 14; for a discussion, Merari 2007), the concept itself tends to escape all essentialist definitions; as Barnett and Reynolds (2009) point out the definition of the concept often constructs a loop: the use of the word terrorism in
media often conforms to what the government calls terrorism. Noting the often quoted sentence, that “one person’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter (Barnett and Reynolds 2009, 5), they cite the guidelines of BBC, Reuters, and Al Jazeera for reporting on incidents that would fall under this concept, noting that the use of more specific (attack, bombing, etc.) words are to be recommended (Barnett and Reynolds 2009, 41–44).

Avoiding the word terrorism itself, however, does not solve the problems of how to cover the reporting of the events. The question is, then, what role the media take in reporting of the conflicted publicity agendas presenting themselves each time when the concept or its derivatives are used. This raises the question of the logic of the involvement of media: is this logic guided by an awareness of the role of the media in the process? The questions can be posed as a distinction between media professionals as part of mediation or as partners in mediatization (c.f., Asp 1986; Livingstone 2009). Are media merely mediating the incidents reported under the heading of terrorism as they evolve? Or are they, as in the mediatized coverage of other types of political events, challenging sources, looking at backgrounds, and in other ways bringing the critical stance and knowledge cultivated within professionalized journalism into play? Are journalists in their reporting acting with consideration of the outcome of their reporting? And if they are, how, and at what stage does this distinction between mediation and mediatization occur?

These questions become highly ideological, as various reflections through different media of events labelled as terrorism are by no means innocent. Whilst the journalists may not sympathize with perpetrators of violence – or the counter-measures taken by authorities, media logics may drive publicity towards blindly being a tool for “terrorist” action (c.f., Nacos 2007, 38), but also for “patriotic” counter action (Husband and Alam 2011, 83–87).

Reporting of other political events tend, in a mediatized logic, to build on professional reflection by the media’s own actors, most pertinently, the journalists. How does the reporting on political actions that fall under the label terrorism come out in comparison with other political reporting?

**Real Time War and Prime Time War**

As noted above, media have developed new communication techniques that – at least apparently – bring the broad public to the scene in real time. Such techniques have dramatically changed the conditions for reporting news. Why is this important? Because, as politicians and news journalists intuitively know, and as also experimental research tells us (e.g., Engel, Kube and Kurschilgen 2011, 15–16), first impressions matter and bad impressions leave more trace than good.
Thus, when an incident occurs, massive and similar media coverage leave a mark on the audience that will later affect perception of further developments of the story.

With modern communication techniques, the pace of the newsbeat has dramatically increased. Nacos (2007, 47) points out that the attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941 were first reported in radio broadcasts on the US mainland only three hours later. The first pictures were published a week later. Diffusion studies show that today, within these same three hours, more than 90 percent of the audience will be informed, if the incident occurs on a time of day when people are awake (Moring 1996; Greenberg et al. 2002; Kanihan and Gale 2003). Furthermore, if the news is big enough, this speedy news diffusion is global. According to research made immediately after the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centre in New York in September 2011, 98 percent of the Hungarians new about the attack soon after it had happened (Nacos 2007, 52).

Also earlier, attacks that were clearly staged for the media – such as the incident in Munich in 1972 where members of the Israeli Olympic team were taken hostage and killed by the Palestinian Black September organization – have been reported with television pictures worldwide without delay. This was, however, a matter of negotiation within many newsrooms. Having myself been a journalist at the Swedish radio news in Finland at the time, I recall the discussions between sports reporters on the spot and home-based journalists specializing on foreign news on how this incident should be covered. Foreign news journalists presented doubts regarding the competence of sports reporters to contextualize the incident. The decision taken was, however, that the unfolding events were transmitted directly to the audience by sports journalists reporting from the spot.

In the reporting of 9/11, the leaders of the Finnish Broadcasting Company after a short discussion decided that news footage will be immediately relayed to the audience, one reason being that all other news media will do this as well, and no news provider can stay behind. The intervention of foreign news journalists, including efforts to contextualize the dramatic footage, thus came along as commentary and post hoc in summarizing newscasts. The same decisions were taken – more or less explicitly, by broadcast media throughout the world. This marked the by far most efficient hijacking of the media so far, followed by an also unprecedented retaliation by the Bush administration.

**The Internet Society Knows No Borders**

For good or for bad, also Internet today has become a relevant medium in the diffusion of news on conflicts that by authorities are labelled terrorism. Already in the 9/11 incident two-thirds of the audience in USA mentioned Internet as an
information source (Nacos 2007, 49). The importance of Internet and mobile phones has been apparent also in the diffusion of other heavy news incidents, such as the tsunami in the Indian Ocean in 2004, or the upheaval in Arabic states in Northern Africa in 2011. Different to national news media, these media outlets are almost impossible to censor (Hoffman 2006; Alves 2007). Thus they present a particular challenge for authorities who may wish to affect the reporting of events, particularly in authoritarian systems that have a strictly controlled media.

At the same time Internet brings yet another reason for traditional news media to react on the spot. Internet has challenged the top-down logics of traditional mass media, meaning that events will disseminate from bottom-up, with or without the contribution of the traditional established mass media platforms and sometimes through their own blogs.

The changing media environment has – for better or for worse – left more reflective news practitioners in a catch-22 situation: being left behind by the real-time transmission of evolving events risks losing the audience, whilst it is required to secure a more reflective and contextualized reporting. Going with the flow of events may secure an audience but gives those actors that are outside the media the privilege of staging the scene according to their (obscure) agendas. Commentary comes second, when first effects on the audience are already in place.

**Media Making the News or Making Media the News?**

The temptation to captivate audiences with new media techniques and real time coverage has in some cases been given tragicomic forms. Thus many newspapers in Finland and elsewhere chose to publish screenshots – that is photographs taken off the television screen; and in these cases in a most evident way – from CNN when covering the Gulf War. In the coverage of 9/11 screenshots were illustrating the falling towers, but also the speeches of President George W. Bush when he announced American counter-measures. The irony in this type of journalistic coverage is that sharper original photographs would most likely have been available. Apparently, real time media has so much stolen the show that also serious newspapers fall for the temptation to present events through representations of the real time coverage.

In a certain sense, this creates a double loop reminding of the famous painting of a pipe by René Magritte, with the text “This is not a pipe”. In this case: *This is not President Bush. It is not even a representation of President Bush. It is a representation of a representation of President Bush, appearing on real time television.*
In covering news this way, even serious newspapers that build on a reputation that they have built by offering context, background and analysis, even further enhance the character of here and now. This lack – in the heat of the occurring newsbeat – of a broader and deeper perspective works into the hands of those parties that strive to, through the media, maximize the advantage of publicity; be it a scare factor, seeking for sympathy, or seeking for patriotic sentiments in order to legitimize counter-violence. The result is easy to predict. Such media coverage serves the interest of those who seek polarization rather than in the service of moderation and a deeper understanding of the roots of a conflict (c.f. Coe et al. 2008, 202).

It must be underlined that not all media, and not all media coverage, follow this pattern. Contextualizing commentary and analysis are indeed included in the media coverage as well. It does, however, tend to fall behind the more dramatic coverage both in first page attention and in time. Thus often the agenda has been set and the story framed by a few dominant themes in advance of more considered reportage being available (Scheufele 1999). The crucial impact of the first formative moments of coverage is at the mercy of the logics established by real time television in prime time war.

The Empire Strikes Back – A Weberian Perspective

A somewhat deeper look at where the above described media logic leads – in light of what we know from communication theory and campaign research – leads to rather pessimistic conclusions. It is a well established fact since early effect studies (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944) that communication rather strengthens existing attitudes than changes them. As we shall see, the reinforcement effect has also been found by research on how attitudes have developed after the reporting in the media of incidents that authorities label as deeds of terrorism.

As was already noted, the initiators of political violence that is labelled terrorism tend to seek public effect. Also for the media much is at stake. The public is alerted; we know from the audience research referred to above that ratings grew sky-high after the 9/11 incident. Furthermore, the public reaction to the incident is also of direct interest to authorities. We know from studies in a Weberian tradition on the logics of administration that growth tends to be a value in itself for all organizations, including the legitimate violence- and counter-violence organizations of the state. From this we may infer that there are no innocent parties when the dramatic event of a “terrorist” act is reported.

As noted briefly in the outset of this chapter, the public reactions registered in research of opinion changes in Western countries have shown increase in system
support. Brewer et al. (2003, 247–248) report increase in presidential support, support of the congress, confidence in intelligence and in the military in USA after the 9/11 incident. This has in many cases been followed by the reorganization of security management including increased resources in many states, as witnessed in the contributions to a relatively recent book on counterterrorism (Alexander, ed., 2006). The authors point to quite concrete counter-terrorism investments in, for example, USA, France and Germany after this incident.

Among the examples presented, we find the establishment of a pre-emptive strategy by the Bush administration, including the instalment of the Patriot Act (2001), enabling the government to be better equipped to “identify, investigate, follow, detain, prosecute, and punish suspected terrorists” (Alexander 2006a, p.37). Among the measures to develop and implement a national strategy to secure the United States from terrorist threats, a new Department of Homeland Security was created in 2003: an extraordinary reorganization of governmental resources to integrate twenty-two agencies and 180,000 employees to provide effective intergovernmental cooperation on national, state, and local levels (Alexander, 2006a, 39).

In France, after 9/11, earlier strategies established in the early 1980s of not using special legislation were abandoned. Specific legislative measures were taken, such as a law on everyday security and combating terrorism in November 2001, allowing for temporary use of counter-terrorism measures (Parmentier, 2006, 69). Whilst recognizing that fighting terrorism involves more than military and repressive measures, France entered into international cooperation including French Intelligence setting up a counterterrorism intelligence center, Alliance Base, in Paris together with the CIA in 2002 (Parmentier 2006, 71: Alexander, 2006b, 196).

In Germany, after 9/11, the Federal Government approved two security packages and various measures including special budget lines in order to destroy terrorist structures through investigation, protect the population and remove causes for terrorism and repel terrorists before they can launch an attack. International measures were taken to the use of military force for counterterrorism purposes outside Germany. For 2002, the Federal Government earmarked a special budget of 1.47 billion Euros for the fight against terrorism. Additional resources were divided, e.g., to the army to improve crisis management, to the Federal Ministry of Interior to strengthen border control and homeland security, to the Foreign Office and the Development Ministry to address causes of terrorism, and for strengthening the Intelligence Service (Schneckener 2006, 85–86).

A recent example, not unexpected in the light of the examples above, is the increase in the Norwegian police resources after the Utøya shooting in July 2011.
The budget increased with almost 90 million Euros to improve preparedness and to secure a state of alert (Politiet 2011).

Media’s Role for the Incestuous Spiral of Violence and Counter-violence

All the examples of political and financial measures listed in the section above were controversial in nature. It is therefore evident that the enormous public attention that followed the 9/11 attack was instrumental in paving the way for the considerable measures, mentioned above, to strengthen the counter-violence machinery of the states. This mechanism has been made explicit in a series of suggestions regarding the media/war relationship by Brown (2003).

Field commanders will have declining autonomy: Because of the potential political significance of their actions their superiors will constantly monitor and seek to control their actions. As the diversity of media sources grow, managing the coverage of war will become more important … … To put it crudely, the separation between the political and the military as spheres of activity become blurred. The communicative elements of warfare have grown in importance. (Brown 2003, 49.)

In the light of what we know from campaign research, that attitudes tend to be reinforced rather than changed, it is not far fetched to assume that parallel logics appear on the other side of the conflict. Scholars have shown the absurdity in constructing a polarized conflict on the alleged grounds of religions (e.g., Thussu 2006, 9–10). It would, however, be logical to assume that if such a conflict description is anyway established through military measures, supported by political messages internationally carried by the media, a polarization occurs that benefit the resource claims for different parties carrying a violent agenda. This mechanism is what we here call an incestuous spiral.

The polarization effect can be further strengthened by differences in the media worlds that people live in. The ownership and political stance of dominant news media also play a role. However globalized the world may be the news agenda of, for example, American Fox News with its conservative leanings and growing audience will probably carry strong impact on the sentiments of numerous American citizens (Coe et al. 2004, 201–202). Efforts from agencies founded in the Arab world and representing perspectives from under-reported regions, such as Al Jazeera, do not have much of a chance to hit home in this audience. Moderating voices easily fall between chairs, once the story-line has been established in people’s minds. As noted above, it is not only easier to reinforce images than to change them; first impressions tend to colour perception of further information, and bad impressions carry better than good.
The complex relationship between terrorism and the media has been discussed by many authors; Wieviorka (1988, 44) talks about a calculated manipulation of what [terrorists] know of media operations; Miller (1982, 1) has called terrorism the media’s step child. Wilkinson (1997) writes

It would be foolish to deny that many modern terrorists and certain sections of the mass media can appear to become locked in a relationship of considerable mutual benefit. The former want to appear on prime time TV to obtain not only massive, possibly worldwide, publicity but also the aura of legitimisation that such media attention gains for them in the eyes of their own followers and sympathisers. For the mass media organisations the coverage of terrorism, especially prolonged incidents such as hijackings and hostage situations, provides an endless source of sensational and visually compelling news stories capable of boosting audience/readership figures. (Wilkinson 1997, 52.)

At the same time it is evident that the media cannot remain silent about dramatic news events. They have to report them, however manipulated they may be. This is the case even when media manipulation is obviously inherent in the act itself, such as in the examples of the Black September attack in Munich 1972 or the 9/11 incident.

However, in the final round, the empire strikes back. Nacos (2007) unmasks what here is called the incestuous relationship formed by violence, counter-violence and the media when she notes that

The act of terrorism is a master key for unlocking the door that grants access to the mass media. This means that crisis managers and response specialists compete with the perpetrators of political violence in that each side wants to have the loudest and most persuasive voice and messages. In this competition, terrorists seem to start out with a significant advantage because their violent deeds are a powerful message that commends the mass media’s attention. But response specialists, crisis managers and political leaders are nevertheless in excellent position to dominate the news because they are part of the cornerstones in the “Triangle of Political Communication” with formal and informal links and relationships in place before emergencies arise. (Nacos 2007, 197)

As has been shown above, in the flood of contrasting and contradicting media messages following dramatic clashes labelled as acts of terrorism, the audience is likely to lean on previously established attitudes. Furthermore, orientation towards security in shocking situations provides political leaders as well as administrative bodies – identified as rescue teams and counterterrorism forces – with compelling arguments for increased legitimacy. This, again, has in cases cited above proven to justify a strengthened resource base.
In Conclusion

Returning to the crucial question, presented at the outset of this chapter: What line of action can journalism, seeking an ethically defendable line of coverage, take in the promiscuous relation between the different forms of political violence as described above? It is clear that the media cannot not report on terrorism and eventual counter measures. Whilst it would be against the basic ethos of news reporting, it would also be counterproductive in a world that is open to global rumours spread in real-time through the Internet and mobile phones.

New media also content-wise present a challenge to journalism, as the importance of fast reporting is growing in the competition with down-up news diffusion originating from uncountable sources of various qualities. Serious journalism takes time. It is worth reflecting on that not only the yellow press but also some serious web media initially reported the shooting in Norway on August 2011 that was carried out by a Norwegian rightwing extremist as having been initiated by activists in the Middle East. This is not the first error in this line by the media.

In this context, serious mass media that guard their credibility have an even more important role than before. The audience must know where to turn for an unbiased and as truthful reporting as possible. This can only be secured by sustaining high standards of critical journalism, and avoiding the temptations of the speculative news beat of the first moments of reporting.

The style of involvement of the media is critical in the wake of such dramatic and politically sensitive events as those discussed in this chapter. The spontaneous, or laissez faire style of reporting evidently leads to further polarization. If the contribution of media – in the context of the ongoing information war around violence and counter-violence of today – shall lead to anything else than further polarization, the media will have to take responsibility. The importance of considerate, contextualizing and balanced journalism grows. And furthermore, the media must be willing to present this information with the same visibility and prominence as the spontaneous reporting growing out of the actions themselves.

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